DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 721 FL 026 660

AUTHOR	Cifuentes, Lauren; Shih, Yu-Chih Doris
TITLE	Learning How To Teach Online: Preservice Teaching Experiences.
PUB DATE	1999-04-00
NOTE	4p.; Journal published by the International Society for Technology in Education.
PUB TYPE	Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Research (143)
JOURNAL CIT	Journal of Online Learning; v10 n3 p17-19 1999
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	College Students; *Computer Assisted Instruction; *Computer Mediated Communication; *Cultural Awareness; Educational Objectives; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Internet; Learner Controlled Instruction; *Preservice Teacher Education; Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS	Taiwan

ABSTRACT

To prepare American preservice teachers for online teaching and for reaching diverse learners, an e-mail correspondence partnership was created between American and Taiwanese university students. Students explored the theory and practice of online instruction, corresponded as "keypals" to teach the English language and American culture, and reflected upon their experiences. Through these activities, American preservice teachers acquired skill in online teaching. The article begins with an overview of the theoretical background of this topic and a review of the objectives of the program. The objectives for the preservice teachers were the following: to gain experience and practice online teaching; to establish a friendship with a student from another culture; to exchange cultural information; to improve online communication skills; and to recognize the benefits and limitations of online learning and teaching. The overall experience was a positive one, and the practice of pairing American and Taiwanese students was continued. It is argued that because it is rapidly becoming the norm for all students and teachers at the university level to be well-connected to the Internet and World Wide Web, having online teaching and learning skills is vital to both learners and teachers and will become increasingly more so. (KFT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 451 721

Learning How to Teach Online:
Preservice Teaching Experiences

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M. Howes
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

LAUREN CIFUENTES AND YU-CHIH DORIS SHIH

Abstract

To prepare American preservice teachers for 1) online teaching, and 2) reaching diverse learners, we created an email correspondence partnership between American and Taiwanese university students. Students explored theory and practice of online instruction, corresponded as keypals to teach English language and American culture, and reflected upon their experiences. Through these activities American preservice teachers acquired skill in online teaching.

Theoretical Background

As telecommunications become available in schools, school teachers need to be able to use them to serve their students. Romiszowski and Ravitz (1997) investigated teachers' perceptions of electronic teaching and found that the reward is "tremendous satisfaction in working towards the goal of developing independent, questioning learners" (p. 673). Communication between teachers and students can be enhanced through computer-conferencing and e-mail connections. Teachers can answer students' questions and provide brief tutorials for students who are having difficulties. However, teaching online is not easy. Therefore, teacher preparation programs are well advised to include training in the use of e-mail as part of online teaching.

In addition, teachers need to be prepared to address the needs of students from diverse cultures. As school demographics change, teachers are confronted with the need to teach students of differing cultural influences and encourage academic achievement for all types of learners (Banks & Banks, 1993). In order to prepare American preservice teachers for 1) online delivery of instruction, and 2) reaching diverse learners, we created an online partnership between American and Taiwanese university students.

Typically, preservice teachers have never taught online and few have experienced online learning. They have no models or knowledge to link to the new experience of online teaching. A constructivist view of learning suggests that students be provided with a variety of resources and approaches to learning a new skill. Therefore, in an undergraduate teacher preparation course in educational technology, preservice teachers were provided opportunities to (a) explore theory relevant to online instruction, (b) view examples, (c) practice teaching online, (d) collaborate for broad understanding, and (e) reflect regarding online teaching.

Objectives

Forty American university preservice teachers preparing to teach English, social studies, political science, economics, and history at the secondary level were paired with Taiwanese university level students majoring in English language and literature. The assignment was for the preservice teachers to correspond as keypals and teach English language and American culture using email as the correspondence tool. The following were the major objectives for the preservice teachers at the American university:

1. Experience and practice online teaching.
2. Establish friendships with a student of another culture.
3. Exchange cultural information.
4. Improve online communication skills.
5. Recognize the benefits and limitations of online learning.
6. Recognize the benefits and limitations of online teaching.

026660
BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In addition, the two collaborating teachers in Taiwan set the following objectives for their students:

1. Write/talk with American students about topics that interest them.
2. Improve English composition skills.
3. Experience online learning.
4. Exchange cultural information.

Readings and Strategies Explored

To prepare the preservice teachers for the difficult task of online teaching, we provided them with a lecture, supportive readings, and example tutorial correspondences. Preservice teachers read on topics such as effective facilitation of computer conferencing (Cifuentes, Murphy, Segur, & Kodali, 1997; Berge, 1997) interactivity in online environments (Gunawardena, 1992), transactional distance (Moore, 1993), and text-based instruction (Jonassen, 1982). In addition, we used a FirstClass(tm) electronic bulletin-board system to model online instruction for them in a mock tutorial. They "lurked" while we demonstrated the roles that the online tutor might take. They then commented in their reflective journals on strategies employed and insights that they gained from watching the ongoing tutorial.

The Process

American preservice teachers were assigned to correspond weekly and send at least eight messages during two months. They began with an introduction of themselves and their intentions to provide instruction in English language or American culture. Then they established the needs of their keypals by asking what their partners needed to learn and how they might help, and examining samples of their partners' writing to ascertain their capabilities. Then they began instructing their partners while attending to their capability levels.

Preservice teachers were instructed to reflect upon the following in their journals: 1) online learning, 2) online teaching, 3) benefits and limitations of the experience, 4) cultural aspects of the experience, and 5) any other concepts that they thought were relevant. They turned in both their printouts of the correspondence and their reflective journals.

The authors numbered each preservice teachers' correspondence and journal (P1-P40) and color coded their contents according to the following categories: online learning, online teaching, benefits, limitations, and cultural aspects. For the purposes of this report, we identified representative comments from each category.

Reflections and Outcomes

Content analyses of the correspondences and the journals revealed that most reactions to the first online teaching experiences were positive. One preservice teacher wrote—"The communications with my Taiwanese partner are going great. . . . I taught her about the American family, and have given her some of my thoughts on college and marriage" [P38]. And another said—"I think teaching via email is an excellent way to expand the learners' playing fields. It provides them with opportunities to learn from so many different perspectives" [P39]. One preservice teacher emphasized the importance of telecommunications as a means of reducing isolation: "I feel that teaching via email is a great way to learn. First, in other countries that may not have good access to all kinds of useful information. Here, I can provide some info that she may not have. Second, she is learning about her field of study from a different perspective and this can help add to her knowledge" [P40].

Preservice teachers learned to value online instruction through the activity. For example, one student reflected:

> Initially, I had some doubts . . . because I had participated in similar programs that I found time consuming and really didn't seem to achieve anything. However, this experience has changed my mind. I now see that such connections offer great learning opportunities . . . that would not be available in the typical class setting [P3].

Another preservice teacher reflected on her experience and concluded that online instruction "allows students to learn about other cultures and teach students about their own, . . . practice their communications skills such as writing, and teach others what they know [which] is the best way to learn and retain information in long term memory" [P2].

Limitations

Several limitations were identified in this proje-t First, e-mail as the correspondence stricted both the U.S. preservice teachers and the Taiwanese students to transfer mainly text-based messages. In the future, other online instructional tools that allow transmission of graphics, sound and visual images (e.g., First Class, Web Course in a Box, Basic Support for Cooperative Work) should be considered. Second, technical problems existed. It was discovered after several message exchanges that some messages of instructors and students from both America and Taiwan bounced back to the senders because of network problems. In addition, we suspect that servers in Taiwan may not recognize some U.S. preservice teachers' e-mail addresses. Finally, corresponding with a distant partner for the purposes of tutorial experience proved time consuming for the preservice teachers, while grading the activity proved time consuming for the instructors.

Limitations were identified in this project that were specifically related to the international nature of the collaboration. For instance, because of the differences in the length of a semester in both countries, the connection could be established for a maximum of two months within the context of the courses. However, parties at both sites could continue their online teaching and learning experience if they wished to after the designated time. Also, the time difference between Taiwan and America limits the ability to meet synchronously through videoconferencing or electronic chats. Preservice teachers expressed the wish to see their online students and communicate in real-time.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Learning about Culture

The most positive outcome of the connection was the pleasure that the participants exhibited regarding learning about the culture of Taiwan. One representative preservice teacher wrote,

> In the course of the Connection we discussed many different cultural issues with an eye towards gaining an increased understanding of the culture of the other person. The topics that we discussed included language, sports, holidays, social groupings, the educational systems, religion, music, and the monetary system. Going into this project, I knew very little of Taiwan and its people beyond their location and a short political history. Now I feel like I have gained some valuable insight into the culture but there is still so much more that I would like to learn [P14].

Several preservice teachers remarked with great surprise that college students in Taiwan are not unlike American students and that the two cultures have much in common. They learned that students in Taiwan rent videos from any number of Blockbuster Video stores, listen to jazz on the radio, and go to theme parks for fun. They "spend time doing the same sorts of things: going to school, studying, and socializing with friends" [P14].

Conclusions and Future Plans

Due to the positive reactions to the online teaching experience, we will continue to collaborate with Taiwanese professors for pairing students for online teaching and learning. Printouts of correspondences and preservice teachers' reflective journals indicate that objectives for the American preservice teachers were met. Most important, from our perspective, preservice teachers acquired skill in online teaching. Taiwanese professors have expressed the wish to continue the correspondence and indicate that their objectives are also being met through the connection.

In response to the expressed wish to see their online partners and communicate in real-time, we will conduct videoconferences between sites. American preservice teachers will have to meet between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m. on one weekday to see Taiwanese students between 8:00 and 10:00 a.m. on the next weekday. Such a meeting will have to take place on a voluntary basis as it will not correspond to class hours. To further encourage the human relationship between partners, we plan to use tools that allow synchronous chats and visual contacts, such as Internet Relay Chats and desktop videoconferencing.

In addition, we have created a web-based forum for computer-conferencing among future correspondents. Thus far, students have only participated in the one-to-one e-mail correspondence. Computer-conferencing will provide for many-to-many online discussions for shared learning. Such communication supports student ownership of learning processes and nontraditional communication patterns so that students can revisit, revise, and build on their own ideas and those of their peers, without the teacher mediating these interactions (Tiessen & Ward, 1998).

As almost all schools and students will be connected to the Internet and provided with telecommunications tools in the coming century, it is necessary that preservice teachers be prepared adequately for the roles that they will fill as inservice teachers. Teacher preparation and training programs in the universities can respond to this need by providing instruction in online teaching skills and reaching diverse learners. Exploring theory and examples, practicing teaching online, collaborating for understanding, and reflecting regarding online teaching and learning can bring preservice teachers to a level of acceptance and competence in the new mode of instructional delivery.

References

Banks, C. A. M. & Banks, J. A. (1993). Social studies teacher education, ethnic diversity, and academic achievement. *International Journal of Social Education*, 7(3), 24-38.

Berge, Z. L. (1997). Computer conferencing and the online classroom. *International Journal of Educational Telecommunications*, 3(1), 3-21.

Cifuentes, L., Murphy, K. L., Segur, R., & Kodali, S. (1997). Design considerations for computer conferences. *Journal of Research on Computing in Education*, 30(2), 172-195.

Gunawardena, C. N. (1992). Changing faculty roles for audiographics and online teaching. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 6(3), 58-71.

Jonassen, D. H. (1982). *The technology of text: Principles for structuring, designing, and displaying text*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.

Moore, M. (1993). Theory of transactional distance. In D. Keegan (Ed.), *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Romiszowski & Ravitz, (1997). Computer-mediated communication. In C.R. Dills and A.J. Romiszowski (Eds.), *Instructional Development Paradigms*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.

Tiessen, E. L. & Ward, D. R. (1998) Creating shared understanding through distributed learning. In Z. L. Berge and M. P. Collins (Eds.), *The Online Classroom in K–12, Vol. I: Teacher Education and Professional Development*. Cresskill NJ: Hampton Press.

Lauren Cifuentes,
Department of Educational Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, Texas A&M University,
College Station, TX 77843-4232
409.845.7806; laurenc@tamu.edu

Yu-Chih Doris Shih,
Department of Educational Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, Texas A&M University,
College Station, TX 77843-4232
409.845.3018; yds1370@acs.tamu.edu